



## Extended Self-Concept and Brand-Related Responses in the Sensory Modality Context

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### 1. Research Backgrounds

Self-concept has been addressed as an important factor that influences consumer behavior. Fashion brands, in particular, are frequently used a way of expressing self to others. However, recent resurgence of research interests in self-concept focuses not on the self-concept *per se*, but on the relationship between the self-concept and brand-related behavior (Kirmani, 2009). Past studies (e.g., Graeff, 1996) identified two aspects of self—inner (private) self and social (public) self, and examined these in the context of privately-consumed or publicly-visible products.

Although fashion products such as apparel, accessories, and fragrances are publicly consumed, there are different sensory modalities (e.g., vision, olfaction, touch) involved in product consumption. While apparel and accessories are easily visible by self and others, the dominant sensory modality for fragrances is smell. Prior studies examined the importance of sensory modalities in product usage and the role of sensory cues in consumers' affective and cognitive responses. However, there is virtually no study that examines how the relationships among self-concept and brand-related responses differ among products that involve different sensory modalities.

Based on cognition-affect-behavioral intention framework (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and the notion of a brand as multidimensional extended self-concept (i.e., extended inner self and extended social self) (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006), this study examines the relationship among the extended self-concept, brand-related emotion (i.e., brand attachment), and brand-related behaviors (i.e., brand loyalty and word-of-mouth). The study also examines whether and how the impact of extended self-concept on brand attachment varies by product type (i.e., visible vs. scent products).

### 2. Hypotheses

H1: Extended inner-self will positively impact brand attachment.

H2: Extended social-self will positively impact brand attachment.

H3: Brand attachment will positively impact brand loyalty

H4: Brand attachment will positively impact word-of-mouth communication.

H5: The impact of extended inner-self on brand attachment will be stronger for a scent product than for a visible product.

H6: The impact of extended social-self on brand attachment will be stronger for a visible product than for a scent product.

### 3. Methods and Results

Based on evaluations by several faculty members and graduate students in one of the major universities in the United States, designer wallet was selected as a visible product and fragrance was selected as a scent product. Using consumer panelists of a commercial online survey company, a total number of 651 cases (designer wallet = 322 and fragrance = 329) was obtained for this study. Participants were 38 as the media age; 64.5% female; and the median income of \$45,000-\$59,999. The measurement items of all constructs were adapted from previous studies.

Both measurement and structural model provided satisfactory model fit: CFI > .95, NNFI > .98, RMSEA < .08. The positive effect of extended inner-self on brand attachment was significant ( $\beta = .544, p < .001$ ), supporting H1. Extended social-self was also found to increase brand attachment ( $\beta = .250, p < .01$ ), supporting H2. Furthermore, there was a positive impact of brand attachment on brand loyalty ( $\beta = .686, p < .001$ ), supporting H3. Finally, brand attachment positively affected word-of-mouth ( $\beta = .728, p < .001$ ), supporting H4. Test for moderating effect of product type showed that the relationship between extended social-self and brand attachment was not statistically significant, not supporting H5. However, there was a significant difference in the path coefficient from extended social-self to brand attachment, supporting H6. Specifically, the path coefficient from extended social-self to brand attachment increased from .17 (fragrance,  $t = 2.35, p < .001$ ) to .38 (designer wallet,  $t = 5.03, p < .001$ ).

### 4. Conclusions and Implications

This study provides empirical support for the different aspects of extended self-concept by examining extended inner-self and social-self and their impacts on both emotional responses (i.e., brand attachment) and behavioral responses (i.e., brand loyalty and word-of-mouth). Generally, the extended inner-self is found to be more important factor than extended social-self in creating brand attachment. While the impact of the extended inner-self on brand attachment is important for both product types, the impact of the extended social-self is stronger for a visible product than for a scent product. Although fashion marketers need to communicate with their consumers through inner self-concept (brand fits one's self-concept), communicating symbolic meanings of a brand and its impact on social image is equally important for publicly visible fashion products.

### 5. References

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